

Planes, Suspects, Drugs Seized in 2-County Bust

By MARK FORSTER *Times Staff Writer*

A drug-smuggling ring based in northern San Diego County that distributed marijuana as far as Alaska and Canada was broken up over the weekend with the arrest of 12 people, U.S. Atty. William Kennedy said Monday.

In raids at 11 locations in San Diego and Riverside counties, U.S. Customs Service agents seized 15 vehicles, \$60,000 in cash, three aircraft, a half-ton of marijuana, a small quantity of cocaine, various weapons and sophisticated radio and weather communications gear.

One of the suspected leaders, John C. Ward, had at his Fallbrook home a satellite weather dish the ring used to coordinate smuggling flights into the United States, Assistant U.S. Atty. Geroge Hardy said.

Another of the suspected ring-leaders, Gary W. Schmidt of Valley Center, was a fugitive from a 1976 charge of air piracy and kidnaping stemming from an incident when Schmidt allegedly stole a plane for a marijuana smuggling run, Hardy said.

Hardy said that during the six-month investigation, law enforcement agents documented the large amounts of currency the ring took out of the country to secretly pur-

chase the drugs in violation of the Bank Secrecy Act.

The act limits how much money can be taken out of the country without notifying custom officials and was directed at drug-smuggling operations.

The ring smuggled drugs in from Mexico and South America and distributed them throughout the United States as well as Alaska and Canada, Hardy said.

Those arrested along with Ward and Schmidt were Charles L. Brown of Tempe, Ariz.; Robert L. Edwards of Julian; his sister, Catherine L. Edwards of Valley Center; and Fredrick A. Horton also of Valley Center.

Also arrested were Farrel F. Guiler and Kenneth P. Cuthbertson both of Escondido; Timothy Ewing of Fallbrook, Larry Reynolds of Riverside and Michael Lacey of Vancouver, Canada.

Ward's wife, Janet R. Ward of Fallbrook, also was arrested.

Hardy said the investigation included Customs and Drug Enforcement agents in California, Washington, Nevada and Texas.

Also participating were the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, New Mexico state police and sheriff's deputies in San Diego and San Bernardino counties.

Operators of Drug Ring Get Prison Terms

The operators of a sophisticated drug-smuggling ring based in Fallbrook were fined \$50,000 and sentenced to prison terms Monday in federal court in San Diego.

Gary Schmidt of Valley Center was sentenced to 10 years in prison and John Ward of Fallbrook was given 8 years in prison by U.S. District Court Judge William Enright. The two men pleaded guilty to one count each of conspiracy to import cocaine and illegally exporting money.

The drug ring operated for nearly five years using aircraft and sophisticated weather equipment, including a satellite weather dish outside Ward's home, to smuggle marijuana from Mexico and cocaine from South America to isolated air strips in Death Valley and near Palm Springs, Assistant U.S. Atty. George Hardy said.

Hardy said the ring probably smuggled in nearly \$1 million worth of drugs before federal drug officials broke it up last November.

Larry Reynolds, a Riverside lawyer, also was sentenced to two years in prison after pleading guilty to using the telephone in connection with the drug-smuggling conspiracy.

Catherine Edwards, Schmidt's girlfriend, was sentenced to two years in prison after she pleaded guilty to one count each of conspiracy to import marijuana and illegally exporting currency.

The U.S. attorney's office has convicted 11 people in the case, Hardy said. Two others indicted in connection with the ring are still fugitives, he said.